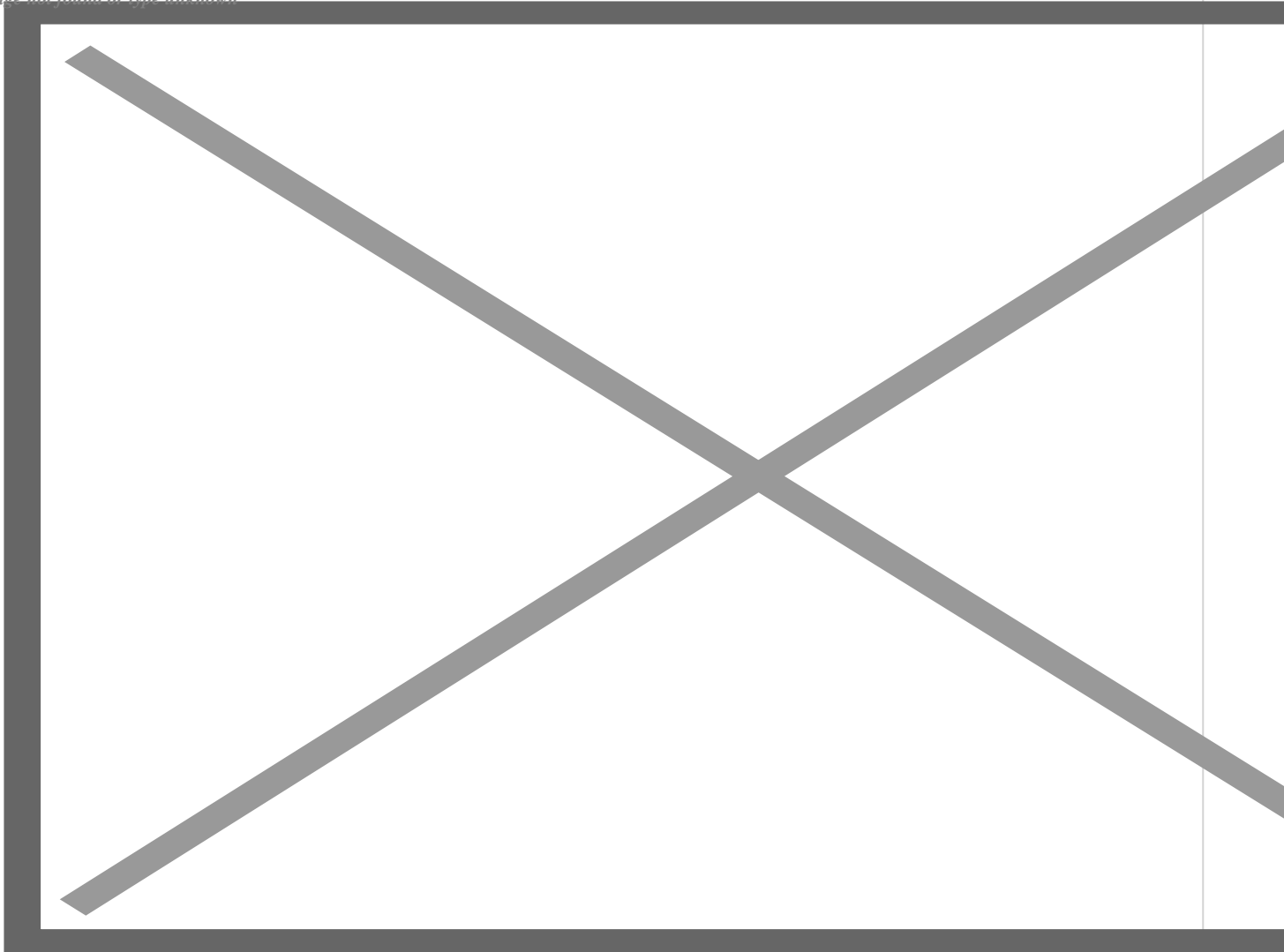


U.S. imposes sanctions on Syria, Iran vows economic support

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U..S. hands off Syria!?

Damascus, July 29 (RHC)-- The United States has announced fresh sanctions targeting the Syrian government and other groups operating in the Arab country just hours after a senior Iranian official met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to declare Tehran's economic support for the war-ravaged country.

The U.S. Treasury Department announced it had imposed sanctions on five Syrian government officials as well as intelligence and security institutions operating in the country. Syria has been subject to rounds of economic sanctions imposed by Washington especially in recent years as the country is recovering from almost a decade of terrorism and war.

The new sanctions were announced hours after Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf met Syria's Assad in a fresh sign of deepening relations between the two allied countries.

A businessman says some 8% of Iran's exports to Iraq, estimated at \$660 million, is rerouted to Syria. Qalibaf said in his meeting with Assad that Iran and Syria would try to replicate their success in cooperating in fight against terrorism by expanding trade and economic ties that would undermine U.S. policy of pressuring sovereign nations through economic sanctions.

"By focusing on trade and economic activities and by supporting manufacturers and traders, we have to attain victory in the economic war just as we did in the military front," Qalibaf was quoted as saying by Iranian news agencies covering his trip to Syria.

Iran has been a major supporter of Syria's war on terrorism since the Arab country slid into war in 2011. Iran has offered extensive military advice to Syria over the years, helping the country liberate much of the territories once controlled by terrorist groups.

Syria's official SANA news agency said in a report that Assad and Qalibaf had called for more cooperation between the private sectors of Iran and Syria in a way that it could help the two friendly peoples confront the economic war and the policy of blockade and sanctions imposed on them.

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